

The Exploration of the Black Woman's Truth: Linking Slavery, Stereotypes, and the media

by

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Abstract

In American culture, black women have often been categorized in stereotypical ways as the hypersexualized jezebel, the subservient mammy, or the angry black woman. These disparities can primarily be seen in our media which has become a major part of culture and deeply influences public opinion. The purpose of this study is to explore how these stereotypes are an integral part of our culture and how the influence of the media affects the black woman's universal image. The main questions this study asks are 1) What are the origins of these stereotypes? 2) How are these stereotypes shown in the media? and 3) How do these stereotypes affect the black woman's image in society? The study defines media as television sitcoms and dramas, and the sample for analysis is made up of seven shows dating back from the 1950's to the present day. The study uses qualitative analysis of these shows to arrive at the main themes that were used to depict black women characters. These themes are then compared with popular stereotypes of black women. Preliminary results show that the stereotypes that were used throughout history to represent black women are still subtly represented in our media. In addition, the study also found that current shows lack an opportunity to connect with younger black women. The study recommends creating a TV show that defies stereotypes and focuses on young black women who have to figure out how to break through them. The results of this study are noteworthy because they will provide a link between stereotypes of black women created as a result of slavery and the stereotypes seen in the media today. The study will also offer a solution by proposing an example of an alternate television show that defies such racial stereotypes.

Introduction

As a little girl, a black woman may hear, “Don’t be too strong. But don’t be too weak either”. This balance of strength and weakness teaches black girls that emotions are weakness while your strength protects you from being abused or misled. In the media, black women tend to be left out of conversations. The stories of crime tend to be about black men and even today when we talk about sexual assault and the mistreatment of women in the workplace, it sometimes feels like it is forgotten that this oversexualization has been normalized for black women. Sexualized being and black woman are synonymous and have been since slaves were brought over into our country. But yet this conversation is rarely covered by our media (Meyers, 2013).

Media has become the most important medium of information and impressions. The American public takes what they see on TV as truth and most times from opinions of people and things come from what we see when we watch a television screen. But what some do not realize is that when it comes to black women, the same stereotypes that have haunted black women for years remain even when a television show is written by a black woman. The jezebel, the mammy, the angry black woman are all stereotypes that have emerged as a result of slavery. Slavery built not only our capitalistic system but also built the foundation of how black women are perceived by white men, white women, and even black men.

The purpose of this study is to bring together slavery, black women, and the media or in other words a linking of truths. The questions that will be addressed are: How has slavery impacted stereotypes; How are black women portrayed in our media in regards to stereotypes; and what can be done to change this image? This study will answer these questions by researching slavery and focusing on how slavery impacted slave women, researching the origins of the three

main stereotypes of black women, and discussing how these stereotypes are shown in television shows from the 1950's to 2017. The study examines whether there are links between slavery, stereotypes, and our media. But more importantly the purpose of this study is to examine the black woman's image in our media and determine if something needs to change.

Slavery and the growth of racial stereotypes

Slavery built the stereotypes of black women that we still see utilized today. Slavery began around the 1400's but did not make its way to the United States until the 1600's. According to various sources, the first slaves arrived to the colonies in 1619. In 1619 approximately 20 slaves were sold in Jamestown. In 1641, Massachusetts becomes the first colony to legalize slavery. Slavery quickly became a major component of the growing American capitalistic society today. When the South began to build major plantations growing cotton, rice, and tobacco, slaves became a major part of the South's growing economy (PBS, n.d.).

In 1712 Willie Lynch, a British slave owner, sets the standard of how slaves were to be made in his speech entitled, "The Making of a Slave";

"Let us make a slave. What do we need? First of all we need a black nigger man, a pregnant nigger woman and her baby nigger boy. Second, we will use the same basic principle that we use in breaking a horse, combined with some more sustaining factors. What we do with horses is that we break them from one form of life to another that is we reduce them from their natural state in nature. Whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take care of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence from them and thereby create a dependency status, so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure".

Willie Lynch's speech further dehumanized African slaves by comparing them with animals. In his speech he talks about step by step how to break down a slave so that they are submissive and also walks through how to pick the right slave. Lynch believes that the slave must

be broken down and kept down in order for them to “learn their place”. He also believes that if the slave woman is broken down, she will fulfill her master’s every desire, “Completely break the female horse until she becomes very gentle, whereas you or anybody can ride her in her comfort”(Lynch, 1712).

The master wants to have control over the female slave. He wants to brainwash her and according to Lynch this allows the slave woman to breed better. The purpose of the slave woman is simple, to breed more boys so that there are more slave men for the fields. But the brainwashed slave woman in Lynch’s world teaches her slave children that they must be submissive to their master, therefore the slave master remains in control. Lynch then goes on to discuss how the slave master must control all aspects of slave life such as language and marriage.

Lynch’s speech put fire under what became white supremacy and the exploitation of the slave woman. His speech only put what was already going on across the growing United States into words. But with Lynch’s ideology in mind, we have to ask ourselves, what was life like for the slave woman? We already understand that masters wanted breeding horses, they wanted workers and baby makers. The slave woman not only did not own her own freedom but she did not own her own body either. To birth a child and to know that this child was only born to succumb to the same horrible lifestyle as its mother took a toll on the slave woman’s mental state. But even more than that, the slave woman had no choice, it was either to birth a child or to be killed. In her autobiography, Linda Brent aka Harriet Jacobs writes about this life of being a slave woman. One of the most notable slave narratives, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, specifically targets the story of the slave woman and how survival was the only option for her.

“Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own”(Jacobs, 1861).

Before I can successfully discuss this quote I have to briefly tell you the life of Harriet Jacobs. Harriet Jacobs was born into slavery but her story begins somewhat happily—whatever happy is for a slave. She lived with her mother and father who were seen as being “well off slaves”. Her mother died when she was six, and Harriet was sent to live with her mother’s mistress. Her new mistress taught her how to read and treated her well. But after her mistress’s death, Harriet was sent to her relative, Dr. Flint, who turned out to be a neglectful and vengeful master who wanted to have sex with Harriet. Harriet avoided her relationship with Dr. Flint by having an affair with Mr. Sands, the white neighbor. Harriet ended up having two children, Benny and Ellen with Mr. Sands, but fearing that her children would be subjected to the same torture from Dr. Flint, Harriet decided to disappear. She spent the next seven years living in the small attic of her grandmother. Her daughter Ellen moved to New York with Mr. Sands while her son remained with her Aunt Martha. Harriet finally escaped the attic and Dr. Flint after seven years and reunited with her daughter. But as soon as life seemed to be going great, a curve hit Harriet’s life. Dr. Flint’s daughter came back to reclaim ownership of Harriet while she was living in Boston with her family, and Harriet is sold to Emily Flint and her husband.

Harriet’s story gives us the first account of how slave women were treated. It is not a secret that slave women faced a worse fortune than slave men. Their bodies were not their own. As young girls who did not understand much about their bodies or where babies came from, young

slave women were often sexually exploited. Dr. Flint broke down Harriet's psyche by constantly threatening her with rape. Her young mind quickly feared this horrible fate; "When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong"(Jacobs, 1861).

Harriet Jacobs's narrative also gives us a little insight into slave culture and the dynamic between slave men and women. In his speech, Lynch states that after allowing slaves to mate, the slave man must be taken away so that the slave woman can focus on raising the slave children. By taking away the slave man, the white master is keeping slaves from becoming too "happy". It becomes another method of slave manipulation. But some masters did allow the slave man and woman to marry. The slave man would have to ask the master for permission and depending on if the master agreed or not, slaves could be married.

But the slave man was not exempt from the manipulation of their white master. Slave men began to see slave women in the same way as their masters. This idea that slave women are for sexual use and are inferior to the man is what brought along many of the disparities seen in black relationships today. According to bell hooks, "Enslaved black people accepted patriarchal definitions of male-female sex roles. They believed, as did their white owners, that a woman's role entailed remaining in the domestic household, rearing children, and obeying the will of husbands". Black women not only had to bear the trauma of being slaves, but also had to bear the trauma of being put into the stereotypical box of male-female relationships.

Black love is based on what slaves saw from their white masters. Slave men took on these ideologies and these expectations grew into what hooks calls the “cult of womanhood”. black women are no different when it comes to being shoved into a stereotypical role. However, white women still had control over their bodies during this time while slave women did not and also were considered inferior to their white sisters.

Slaves were not only property. They were also entertainment. Slaves with talents were forced to perform for their white masters, “Enslaved people were also forced to sing. Owners believed that singing “livened them up.” So those who were about to be auctioned were made to sing. And after the auctions, on forced marches to the plantation, drivers demanded songs of weary and footsore slaves. But it was the slaves who chose what they would sing. Time and again, they lifted their voices in songs that comforted, consoled, and finally, spoke of freedom” (Hine et al, 1999). Singing was not the only form of entertainment that slaves gave their white masters. They also would play instruments, tell stories, or dance until the master told them to stop.

This idea of black people being entertainment cultivated what became the early stereotypes in early television. In the 1800's mammy culture grew in the United States. The “mammy” can be defined as a black woman who works in the house of white people and cooks, cleans, and tends to the family. The stereotypical mammy is an uneducated, big, dark skinned black woman who wears rags and has a boisterous personality. She becomes the matriarch of the white family, with witty comments and a comforting spirit. Her life is surrounded by the family in which she serves. This narrative became very popular especially in the 1830's due to the Aunt Jemima

brand, a well known pancake and syrup brand started by the R.T. Davis Milling Company. The company hired Nancy Green, a slave woman, to be spokesperson for the company in 1890 which thus made the idea of the “mammy” very popular (McElya, 2007).

Sarah Baartman and the creation of black female oversexualization

I have always seen her picture floating around on the internet and in various textbooks. But never did I think to research her story. In every picture, she was featured as a woman with a big butt and wide hips who was put on display for White men to look at. To me, the body of a black woman has always been extraordinary. We come in an array of shapes, sizes, and tones of brown. Our lips range from being thin to being voluptuous. I have always been forced to recognize that my shape is also a major part of my identity as a black woman. Growing up I noticed as I reached puberty, I started to grow into the same shape as the many women around me. My hips were a little wider than others and I started to understand why my hair was kinkier than the girls in my class.

But still I never really understood the implications or even the history around the black woman's body type. Like all races, black women come in various shapes and sizes. However, the body type of a black woman has become another point of criticism in their portrayal. Black women have been ridiculed because of their bodies. Like black men, they are stereotyped as being similar to monkeys. But the difference between black men and women is that not only is a black woman's body portrayed as a monkey, it is also used to judge her negatively. One of the earliest examples of this is Sarah Bartmann, a former black slavewoman, who spent years travel-

ing across Europe in a freak show because of her large buttocks. The body that today would be considered attractive by some was a body that was considered abnormal.

She was known at the “Hottentot Venus”, a goddess of some sorts. Her large hips and huge thighs were the center of a public spectacle. Her death was only consummated with even more of a spectacle. Baartman's body was used for scientific experiments by George Cuvier. He later wrote his findings in his book and said that her genitals were the same as monkeys; “I was curious to know if the pelvic bones had experienced some modification from this extraordinary overload that they carry,” Cuvier wrote. “I have thus compared the pelvis of my Bushman female with those of negresses and of different white women; I have found it to be more similar to the first, that is to say, proportionally smaller, less flared.... All these characteristics link, but with a quantity nearly imperceptible, the negresses and the Bushmen females with female monkeys” (Cuvier et al, as cited in Sharpley-Whiting, 1999).

Cuvier went on to create a mold of Bartmann's body and even preserved her genitals. He then presented her genitals to the Academie to show off his greatest finding that black women and monkeys are similar. The reason that Sarah Baartman is important to me and this research is that her story is the story of so many black women from then to now. Our bodies are side shows, they are replicated by some and admired by others. Since slavery, the black woman's body was taken from her and turned into a temple of sexual lust and hatred. The black female slaves were scapegoats to the White master's sexual fantasies while the white woman remained the beacon of a happy home. Sarah Baartman is the oversexualized black woman that we see too often in our media today.

Literature Review

The marginalization of black women continued even after slavery was abolished. In modern times, black women found themselves excluded from women's rights movements and were forced to be on the sidelines in a country that they called home for more than two centuries. When our country was first beginning to put together the puzzle pieces of democracy, it was known that our foundation was created for land owning white men. White women were seen as inferior and were expected to be the vessels for children and a healthy household. In 1848, the movement began with the women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The meeting was the catalyst that began the 50-year movement for equality under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a plethora of others (National Women's History Museum, n.d.).

The women's suffrage movement was not exclusive of racism. In fact black women were not included in this movement; women like Susan B. Anthony were fighting for white women; "I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman"(Susan B. Anthony, 1866). According to bell hooks, "By continuously making this analogy, they unwittingly suggest that to them the term "woman" is synonymous with "white women" and the term "blacks" synonymous with "black men". What this indicates is that there exists in the language of the very movement that is supposedly concerned with eliminating sexist oppression, a sexist-racist attitude toward black women". black women supported the efforts of the women's suffrage movement and yet were still invisible in the movement.

The invisible black woman in the women's suffrage movement forced black women to take matters into their own hands. They had to balance being a part of the civil rights movement while remaining a part of the women's suffrage movement. The invisibility of black women

during this movement questions the foundation and definition of feminism. Feminism is defined as “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes or organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In other words feminism is the ideology that all men and women are created equal.

But the question remains of what really is feminism. Feminism is the belief in equality for all sexes. It is the idea that men and women are equal and should be treated as such politically, economically, and socially. Feminism is not a bashing of the other sex or an ideology that basically states that man is bad, woman is good (Gay, 2014). But as hooks stated before, the word woman especially in the women's suffrage movement and the ideology of feminism refers to white women rather than black women. So what happens? Black women are invisible in the women's suffrage movement and also are left out when the term “blacks” is used. This leads to a special revolution, an ideology that support black women.

Black feminist thought is a result of the racist opposition of the women's suffrage movement. There is no definitive answer or definition of what black feminism is, however it is easy to pull together the pieces to create the foundation of this movement. Audre Lorde writes, “Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying”.

Another black feminist, Michelle Wallace writes;

“It took me three years to fully understand... that the countless speeches that all began “the black man...” did not include me. I learned. I mingled more and more with a black crowd, attended the conferences and rallies and parties and talked with some of the most loquacious of my brothers in blackness, and as I pieced together the ideal that was being presented for me to emulate, I discovered my newfound freedoms being stripped from me, one after another. No, I wasn't to wear makeup, but yes, I had to wear long skirts that I could barely walk in. No, I wasn't to go to the beauty parlor, but yes, I was to spend hours controlling my hair. No, I wasn't to flirt with or take shit off white men, but yes, I was to sleep with and take unending shit off black men. No, I wasn't to watch television or read *Vogue* or *Ladies' Home Journal*, but yes, I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies”.

According to bell hooks:

“As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized “other” that we can exploit or oppress. (Children do not represent an institutionalized other even though they may be oppressed by parents.) White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favor their interests and support the continued oppression of other groups”.

What Lourde, Wallace, and hooks are stating is that black feminism is a movement that identifies the oppression of black women not only by the majority (i.e white women and white men) but it is also identifying the oppression of black women by black men as well. The foundation of the ideology is bringing together the fact that black women are invisible in the feminist movement and black women are also enduring oppression from all genders. I pulled together these ideals in order to make sense of this movement on my own. No, I am not a scholar or have any sort of degree in this field. But because this paper is my truth, I had to conjure my own definition of black feminism; Black Feminism: The ideology and movement in order to combat racism and sexism by uplifting and unifying black women by acknowledging their oppression.

Black feminism to me acknowledges the stereotypes against black women. Today, we use black feminism in the form of a hashtag, #blackgirlmagic. This new age movement is how millennials are combating with present day stereotypes and oppression. The terms “thots” and “hoes” are now used in regards to women in general. The invisibility of black women can be added with the extensive list of stereotypes against them. But the main categories that I will define for the purpose of this research are: the jezebel, the mammy, and the angry black woman. To start off this discussion I think the best thing to do is to simply define these terms by their dictionary definitions:

- “Jezebel: an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman”(Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
- “Mammy: a black woman serving as a nurse to white children especially formerly in the southern U.S.”(Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
- “The Angry Black Woman(also known as Sapphire): A state of mind that black females can go into if given proper stimuli. This results in unpredictable behavior, and usually results in violence and/or chaos. ‘*You can make a sistah get all ABW if you try and get’wither man.*’”(urbandictionary.com, n.d.)

Normally, I would not use urban dictionary as a credible source, but because this site is used by millennials for definitions, I thought it was important to use a definition from a source that most of my age group uses. I have always heard of these stereotypes, in fact I have been accused several times of having ABS or angry black woman syndrome. I can raise the inflection in my voice or seem a little too passionate about something and it is taken as anger. I already wear my blackness like clothing but because I am a black woman, I wear a permanent shirt that says “Warning: Angry Black Woman”. Because of this label, I have had to soften myself kind of like putting a lamp shade over a light. The light is still strong but its just soften down a bit. I know I am not the only black woman who has been told “you are too strong” or “watch your tone” in order to only soften myself to seem like I am not so angry all the time.

According to research by Melissa Harris-Perry, “As they identified the main stereotypes, the focus group participants said that black women are seen either as "oversexed" or as "fat mummies who aren't thinking about sex at all." There was broad agreement that white people generally saw them as either promiscuous or asexual. "Jezebel," "maid," and "Mammy" were the

terms they used most often to label these stereotypes. Margaret, a 52-year-old woman from the West Beverly neighborhood of Chicago, said, 'Just because we are African we're supposed to be wild and all this. We are supposed to be from the jungle and like to have wild sex. Like That is all we think about. Folks think we're hot to trot. Or they think we're Aunt Jemima. It's never in between.'" Harris-Perry worked with a focus group of black women to discuss the stereotypes against them and as the quote shows, these stereotypes are apparent to all black women.

The definitions of these stereotypes go back to slavery which I discussed earlier. Black women were used as sexual beings and were oversexualized as slaves. Sarah Baartman's story is a prime example of this; she was displayed in freak shows simply because her body was different than others. Big hips, breasts and buttocks were too different for white people and this was a part of the long lineage of oversexualization for black women. The Jezebel stereotype stems from the oversexualization of black women. As bell hook writes, "since woman was designated as the originator of sexual sin, black women were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labeled jezebels and sexual temptresses and assumes of leading white men away from spiritual purity into sin". Today the word Jezebel has been replaced with "thot" or "hoe". Black women are still seen as the magical elixir that is needed for man's sexual desires and sins.

While Jezebels are the sinners, those who do not sin are mammies or the Aunt Jemimas. Like Beulah in the Beulah Show, black women are known for being portrayed as the homemakers or the matriarchs that fixes everyone's problems and according to Melinda Perry-Harris;

"Mammy is symptomatic of consistent and repeated misrecognition. Rather than seeing black female domestic workers accurately as laborers, the Mammy myth portrays them as unwavering in their commitment to the white domestic sphere. In this role, Mammy serves to stabilize the racial and gender order, and therefore the order of the state."By misogynist white supremacist definitions, Mammy is to be hailed as a patriot. By enjoying her servitude, she acts as a healing salve for a nation ruptured by the sins of racism. "Seeing the former slave woman visually

transformed into a contented servant absolved everyone of past transgressions and future responsibility toward the freed people”.

Mammies are the black women that white people want us to be. Mammies are docile, subservient, and most of all they are homely Christian women ready to do whatever her white master tells her to do. For black men, mammies are the women that will be there to cook and clean for you. Mammies are the “Susie home makers”, the ones who keep the household together. Mammies are the acceptable black woman.

Last but not least, the angry black woman or sapphire. I could say that this stereotype is the most common one used because it is referred to more than the rest. I think every time a person sees a black woman, they immediately see “RED ALERT! RED ALERT! Approach with caution”. But as we see in our media, men see us this way and it isn't a secret or something hidden behind words, they wear it on their foreheads like a major sign, “I think black women are angry”. In *Sister Citizen*, Harris-Perry uses the example of Cal Thomas as he discussed the political candidate Barack Obama in 2008. Thomas was recorded stating, “Look at the image of angry black women on television. Politically you have Maxine Waters of California, liberal Democrat. She's always angry every time she gets on television. Cynthia McKinney [former congresswoman from Georgia], another angry black woman. And who are the black women you see on the local news at night in cities all over the country. They're usually angry about something. They've had a son who has been shot in a drive-by shooting. They are angry at Bush. So you don't really have a profile of non angry black women ... [except] Oprah Winfrey”(Harris-Perry, 2014).

Thomas's statements are the definition of how black women are seen especially in our media. This stereotype is what makes black women unacceptable because we are not being quiet

or not allowing our bodies to be abused by sexual predators. This stereotype is what makes people fear black women and most of all is what makes us un-attractive to men. In her focus group, Harris-Perry had the 35 women describe themselves and these findings are not surprising; “Sassy, Mouthy, Attitude Aggressive, Go-getter, and a self-starter Strong, nice. Juicy, smart, spoiled, outgoing, friendly; Crazy, friendly, self-motivated, hard-working; Crazy, reliable, friendly, conceited, loud, strong, spoiled, moody; Fun, smart-ass, picky, humorous, bossy, and always having a million things to do; Stubborn, analytic, outgoing, supportive, brutally honest”. Because black women are so use to everyone using our stereotypes against us that we start to believe that we are these stereotypes. What makes this more unsettling is that we have grown accustomed to this and it doesn't help that we as black women allow ourselves to be displayed like this in our media.

In order for me to digest all this information, I had to come up with definitions of my own. I needed to make sure I understood what these stereotypes mean and how they relate back to slavery. The jezebel is the misinterpretation of the black woman's sexual torment as promiscuity. The jezebel is the product of male bodies feeling the need to use black women as concubines for their sexual desires. Jezebels are the one night stands that aren't wanted or desired by black women. On the other hand, mammies are the black women that is a slave but she is a slave with extra privileges. She is the product of white people wanting to keep black women in our place while using us to fix their problems and take care of their homes. Mammies are the black women that everyone wants us to be. Finally, the angry black woman. This stereotype is just another way to oppress black women. Because she is not too sexual, because she is not too homely, she has to be angry or sassy. She is the neck rolling comedic effect in television shows. She is the woman

who has to be pissed off all the time just to make something sell. She is the misinterpretation of passion. The angry black woman is the black woman misunderstood.

The stereotypes used against black women have become a notable trend in our media. But even more than that they have become major factors in how black relationships are shown on television and the black male and female dynamic. It is very rare on television today to see a healthy and striving black family. We once had the Cosby's or the Evans on TV to look up to. Now it seems that the dynamic between black men and women are tumultuous and most prime time TV shows have black women who can not seem to get a man or portray a black woman in a unstable relationship. What is even more dumbfounding is that interracial relationships are tumultuous as well and in some aspects black women are mistreated by white men just as much as they are black men on present day television shows.

This led me on a quest to understand how white and black men viewed black women. I felt that this was important for because as a black woman, I wanted to know the research on these areas but I also felt that in order to understand the portrayal of black women in our media, I had to understand how we are being viewed. In order to understand how white men view black women, I read *Mythologizing Black Women Unveiling White Men's Deep Frame on Race and Gender* by Brittany Slatton.

Slatton's study used an online questionnaire to ask 134 white men their opinions of black women. She started by researching the stereotypes of black women and asked the men in her focus groups about such stereotypes. Slatton's group showed that most of the men who answered the questionnaire had little interaction with black families growing up (Table 1.1). She also found

that out of this group that 23% of the men had some form of a relationship with black women (Table 1.2)

Table 1.1 Experiences with Black Community

| Average Neighbourhood Composition | | Family Interactions with Black Families Growing Up | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|--|-----|
| No Black Families | 55% | Never | 24% |
| A Few Black Families | 55% | Rarely | 48% |
| 50% Black Families | 8% | Often | 28% |
| Other | 3% | | |

Note: Reprinted from *Mythologizing Black Women Unveiling White Men's Deep Frame on Race and Gender* by Brittany Slatton, 2013.

Table 1.2 Experiences with Black Women

| Friendships with Black Women | | Number of Personal Interactions with Black Women | |
|------------------------------|-----|--|-----|
| No Close Friendships | 38% | Almost No Personal Interactions | 17% |
| 1-2 Close Friendships | 31% | Few Personal Interactions | 29% |
| 3-4 Close Friendships | 14% | Some Personal Interactions | 31% |
| 5 or More Close Friendships | 14% | Many Personal Interactions | 23% |

Note: Reprinted from *Mythologizing Black Women Unveiling White Men's Deep Frame on Race and Gender* by Brittany Slatton, 2013.

Slatton then asked the men in her questionnaire about their attraction to black women, “Around 54 percent of white male respondents describe themselves as physically attracted to black women, while 46 percent describe themselves as either rarely attracted to black women or not attracted to black women at all. Those respondents that describe themselves as rarely attracted or having no physical attraction to black women are most likely to define that lack of attraction to black women in the following language: “coarse” or “nappy” hair; “black” facial features, “big lips,” and “wide noses”; dark skin; and “larger” and “disproportionate” body shapes”. She also found that the men out of this group that were attracted to black women stated that, “Those respondents that describe themselves as attracted to black women state that they are most attract-

ed to black women's eyes, lips, and skin tone. However, some of the respondents that described themselves as attracted to black women state that they are not attracted to black women with kinky hair, wide noses, and large body shapes, and some have preferences for black women with light skin and straight hair"(Slatton, 2013).

"Sexual attraction for me is a combination of physical and personal attributes. If I find a "black" woman attractive, it is because their hair type and facial features are more representative of the Caucasian race. If that aspect is attractive, then their speech and intelligence level would have to be more representative of that found more prevalent in other races (such as Caucasian or Asian—i.e.: anthropological mongoloids)." - Ross, a middle age man from Texas (Slatton, 2013).

There is a known saying amongst black woman, "Black men don't want us, so why not get a white man?" But Slatton's research shows that white men view us just as badly as black men. Ross's statement is a true experience of many black women. I for one understand that being lighter skinned allows me some privilege because I am closer to white than my darker sisters. But to some men in order to be attractive you must have light skin, straight hair, and a body that is proportional—no large hips or lips or any features of that sort.

My quest to learn about how black women are viewed by the opposite sex led me to researching about how black men view black women. But to go back to Slatton's research, I have concluded that white men do not view black women as positively as black women think. There is a undoubted notion in the community of black women that if black men don't want us, get a white man who will. This saying is something I have heard from my mentors and peers throughout my life and Slatton's research proved to me just how wrong this statement is. White men want a black woman who has rid herself of blackness. She is a modern day mammy with jezebel

tendencies. No recollection of the sapphire is a part of her being. She is the black woman reserved.

Methods

The questions of this study are: How has slavery impacted stereotypes; How are black women portrayed in our media in regards to stereotypes, and what can be done to change this image? Slavery was first researched to give context and background on the three stereotypes associated with black women. Then this study analyzed black feminism and the basic ideology of how white men view black women. Ten shows were analyzed for the purpose of this research. The first episode of each show was analyzed by its dialogue, camera angles, and character's clothing. Each character was then classified as one of the three stereotypes (mammy, jezebel, and angry black woman or sapphire). Only the first episode of each of the shows was analyzed because the first episodes determines the audience's interests and showcases the main themes of the show. The first episode is also meant to make an impression and get the audience's to continue to watch the show.

The camera angles discussed in this study are: close ups, medium shots, head and shoulder shots, pan, and zooms. Close ups can be defined as "a shot taken from a close distance in which the scale of the object is magnified, appears relatively large and fills the entire frame to focus attention and emphasize its importance". A medium shot can be defined as "a conventional camera shot filmed from a medium distance". Head and shoulder shots are shots that frame the head and shoulders of a character and pulls importance to their facial expressions. A pan is a moving shot that moves from one side of a frame to the other and a zoom is a shot in which the camera moves in closer to a person or object in one single motion (Dirks, n.d.). The purpose of

the close up is to capture facial expressions and it is a shot that depends on the actor to be able to portray the story through their dialogue and facial variations(New York Film Academy, 2015).

The medium shot " aims to capture subtle facial expressions combined with their body language or surrounding environment that may be necessary to provide context"(New York Film Academy, 2015). The head and shoulder shot acts in the same way as the close up and is used to show facial expressions. These shots are used to pull the audience's attention to the reactions and emotions of the characters while giving context to the overall story.

Findings

The importance of Slatton's research in regards to this study is that it gives a brief idea of how white men view black women. More importantly, understanding how white men view black women is important especially in the television industry because white men typically write shows starring black women. I will find support for this theory by looking at the first episode of the shows that I have chosen to study for this research.

Table 1

| Show Name | Episode/Year aired | Year | Director's Name and race | Executive Producer's name and race | Writer's name and race |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>The Beulah Show</i> | "Beulah Goes Gardening" | 1952 | Richard L. Bare (white man) | Tom McKnight (white man) | Nathaniel Curtis (white man) |
| <i>Good Times</i> | Season 1, Ep. 1: "Too Old Blues" | 1974 | Bob LaHendro (White man) and Donald McKayle(Black Man) | Norman Lear (white man) | Bob Peete (Black man) |
| <i>Gimme A Break!</i> | Season 1, Ep.1: "Katie the Crook" | 1981 | Howard Storm (white man) | Mort Lachman(white man) | Sy Rosen (white man) and Mort Lachman(white man) |
| 227 | Season 1, Ep. 1: "Honesty" | 1984 | Ellen Chaset Falcon(white woman) | Dick Bensfield (white man) | Bobby Crawford (white man) |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|------|---|--|--|
| <i>The Cosby Show</i> | Season 1, Ep.1: “Pilot” | 1984 | Jay Sandrich(white man) | Marcy Carsey(white woman) | Ed. Weinberger (white man) and Michael J. Leeson (white man) |
| <i>Living Single</i> | Season 1, Ep.1: “Judging by the Cover” | 1993 | Tony Singletary (black man) | Tom Anderson (white man) | Yvette Lee Bowser (black woman) |
| <i>Scandal</i> | Season 1, Ep. 1: “Sweet Baby” | 2012 | Paul McGuigan (white man) | Betsy Beers (white woman) | Shonda Rhimes (black woman) |
| <i>Being Mary Jane</i> | Season 1/The Movie “Being Mary Jane: The Movie” | 2013 | Salim Akil(black man) | Salim Akil (black man) and Mara Brock Akil (black woman) | Mara Brock Akil (black woman) |
| <i>How To Get Away with Murder</i> | Season 1, Ep 1. : “Pilot” | 2014 | Michael Offer (white man) | Shonda Rhimes (black woman), Betsy Beers (white woman), and Peter Nowalk (white man) | Shonda Rhimes (black man) and Peter Nowalk (white man) |
| <i>Insecure</i> | Season 1, Ep. 1: “Insecure As Fuck” | 2016 | Melina Matsoukas (Biracial/black woman) | Dave Becky(white man), Issa Rae (black woman), and Larry Wilmore(black man) | Issa Rae (black woman) and Larry Wilmore (black man) |

I was able to find this information by simply looking at the discography of each show and googling the names of directors, writers, and executive producers. The director, writer, and executive producer are the three main people in charge of a television show other than the network or the corporate people. The executive producer is the creative vision behind a television show, he or she is in charge of the concept or the overall “auteur vision” of the show (Billings, n.d.). The director is in charge of the shots and handling the production aspect of the show; he or she works under the executive producer to ensure that the show fits the executive producer’s vision (Billings, n.d.). The writer’s job is to write a screenplay in narrative form, they are charged with coming up with the basic vision of the show (Billings, n.d.).

Out of the 10 shows of this study there were 6 white male directors, 7 white male executive producers, and 8 white male writers. Also out of the 10 shows there were 3 black male direc-

tors, 2 black male executive producers, and 2 black male writers. The results show that there was 1 white woman director, 3 white woman executive directors, and no white woman writers. Finally, the results show that there was 1 black woman/woman of color director, 3 black woman executive producers, and 4 black women writers.

This preliminary research shows that white men are behind the camera writing shows that have a black female lead or main character. According to a study by Dr. Martha Lauzen, “39% of women are producers, 33% of women are writers, 28% are executive producers, 23% are creators, 22% are editors, 17% are directors, and only 3% are directors of photography. . She also found that 21% of broadcast television characters are black females and “on programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 38% of major characters”.

Dr. Lauzen's study also shows the lack of black female involvement with the creation of television shows. Without this representation, the stereotypes discussed in this study will only continue to be manipulated and depicted throughout our media. The definitions that I have given you before, to me seem to be outdated as we move forward with this study. The mammy is no longer just the black woman working in a white household, the jezebel is no longer just the promiscuous black woman, and the angry black woman is no longer just the powerful spitfire. The new definitions that I have concluded are the following:

- The Mammy: the black woman matriarch, the caregiver, the homemaker
- The Jezebel: the sexual deviant, the slutty best friend, the over sexual comedian
- The Angry Black Woman (Sapphire): the black woman with the attitude, the sassy comedian, a black woman with severe strength

Stereotypes in our media are displayed not only through scripts but also through all aspects of a television show. For example, in order to depict a black woman in the mammy stereotype, the creators may cast a bigger boned older black woman who wears very modest clothing and is the matriarch of her household. This character is known for fixing all of the issues in the household and is in charge of keeping the family together and in check. Because the majority of television shows especially before 1980's were created by white men, they did not realize that their use of certain aspects causes these same stereotypes to exist today. For the purpose of my research, I chose to look at the following for the first episode of each of my 10 shows to express how these stereotypes exist: clothing/costumes, camera angles, script, and characterization. I will also classify each of these characters using one of the three stereotypes discussed (mammy, jezebel, and the angry black woman).

Show 1: *The Beulah Show*, "Beulah Goes Gardening"

In 1939, "The Ethel Waters Variety Show" appeared on NBC. Ethel Waters then became the first Black woman to appear on a television series with her portrayal of Beulah in "The Beulah Show". Waters only portrayed this character for a year before the show moved to Hollywood. In 1947, Hattie McDaniel made history with her acting on the "The Beulah Show"(Hill et al). The first thing I noticed about this show is the description on the back of the DVD case, "The family revolves around Beulah, a big woman with a big smile and a bigger heart". To me, this just shows how stereotypical this show will be and my first thought was to not even watch this show and to omit it from my thesis. However, I watched the first five episodes and tried to have an open mind to this time period. The first episode of the season, Beulah goes gardening. She is given the task of planting roses in the Henderson's backyard and somehow the potted roses go

missing while Beulah is at the florist. Beulah and her boyfriend Bill rush to try to find the beloved plant before Mr. Henderson can figure it out. It ends with Beulah saving the day and she once again is the Black super-mammy.

Beulah is dressed in typical housemaid or mammy attire in this episode. She wears a dress that reaches her ankles, a slicked back bun, and an apron. The camera in this episode uses a lot of close ups of Beulah's face. The importance of a close up is to pull attention to the emotion or facial expression. The director in this episode decided to use a close up especially at the end of the episode as Beulah ends the show with a witty comment and a big boisterous smile. Beulah is classified as a mammy because she is the black woman worker for a white family who fixes the Hendersons' problems and comes to the rescue. She is big, bold, sassy, and most of all motherly to everyone around her. Beulah's accent in this show is stereotypical of the time period. She doesn't have the stereotypical slave accent using slave vernacular but she speaks quickly and fiercely. Her tone is either empathetic or stern which adds to her overall depiction as a mammy.

Table 2

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|---|--|--|----------------|
| Beulah | Housemaid attire: slicked back bun, ankle length dress, and a apron | Medium Shot (00:03:41) Head and shoulders shot (00:04:24) Close up (00:04:41) Final scene close up (00:24:13) | "Phil Jackson you know what kind of animal sinks a sunken ship?"(00:03:11) "There's a place for everything in the world but weeds haven't found theirs yet" (00:04:51) "Well when you have to do a thing, you just do it" (00:21:37) | Mammy |

Show 2: *Good Times* Season 1, Ep. 1: "Too Old Blues"

The Evans family lives in a 1970's ghetto. James and Florida struggle to provide for their three kids, J.J, Thelma, and Michael, while ensuring that they keep a roof over their head and maintain their faith. James may be the patriarch in this family but Florida is the glue that holds together the household. In this first episode, Florida is introduced as the disciplinarian as her three kids argue. She is dressed in a bright orange robe with a orange button up underneath. Her hair is in a short fro with a small grey streak up the front. Florida is dressed as a woman of her decade. The camera primarily shows Florida in close ups in order to bring comedic effect to her stern looks and sassy comebacks. The final scene in the show is of Florida as she prays for her family. She is scene in a close up and she looks up to God while she smiles big at the end of her prayer. Florida is classified as a mammy because she is the matriarch, the woman who takes care of the household and is the strength for her family.

Table 3

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|---|--|----------------|
| Florida Evans | Orange robe and orange button up shirt. Hair is in a small afro. She later takes off the orange robe and has on a orange button up and pants. | Close up (00:03:38) Close up (00:04:51) Close up (00:09:29) Medium shot (00:12:02) Close up (00:16:01) Final scene Close up (00:28:56) | "The only took out my appendix, not my mouth or my fist" (00:04:03) "This is a Christian house!" (00:04:46) "I got 100 ways to warm your butt if you do" (00:06:37) "James the Lord don't want you hustlin' no pool" (00:15:28) | Mammy |

Show 3: "*Gimme A Break!*" Season 1, Ep. 1 "Katie the Crook"

Nell made a promise to take care of the Kaniskys after the death of Mrs. Kanisky. She works as a housemaid for the Chief and his three daughters. Nell is the voice of reason and most of all the no-nonsense matriarch of the family. In this first episode, Nell is dressed simply in a ankle length dress and has a short curly hairstyle. The camera in this episode tends to pan or even move swiftly with Nell as she gracefully whisks her body across the screen. The camera also uses head and shoulder shots to capture Nell's sassy facial reactions to things that are said to her. Nell is a mammy but she is a mammy with a hint of sapphire. She is a mammy in the sense that she is the matriarch in the Kanisky household. But she isn't your typical mammy, she comes with a lot of sass and sapphire-esque comebacks. Her witty comments are what make you laugh during the show and ultimately gives this show character.

Table 4

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|---|---|---|------------------------------|
| Nell | Ankle length blue dress. Hair is in a short curly style. | Head and shoulders shot (00:02:10) Close up (00:03:37) Pan (00:04:57 -00:05:00) Head and shoulders shot (00:05:15) | "Put up ya dukes. I'ma teach you how to box" (00:01:54) "If you did dear, you better blindfold your teddy bear" (00:04:53) "Oh massa massa! Please don't shoot massa!" (00:05:47) | Mammy with a mix of Sapphire |

Show 4: 227 Season 1, Ep.1: "Honesty"

Mary and Sandra are complete opposites but still somehow they gain a friendship. Mary is married to Lester and has a child. She is the matriarch of her family and is dressed as such. She wears a purple shirt with pants and flats, a black dress and shawl, and a blue ankle length dress in the first episode. Mary not only handles the daily tasks of her household while her husband

works, but she also acts as the disciplinarian for her daughter. Sandra on the other hand is single and lives alone. She is outgoing and her overexaggerated voices and faces are what bring her character to life. In this first episode, Sandra is dressed in form fitting clothing that is vibrant but accentuates all of her best assets. Both Sandra and Mary are framed using close up and head and shoulder shots. The use of these shots pulls attention Sandra and Mary's facial expressions as they respond with witty or sassy comebacks. Mary would be classified as a mammy because she is the matriarch of her household and fulfills her duty as the glue that keeps not only her family together but her friends as well. Sandra would be classified as a jezebel due to her sexualized jokes and heightened thirst for a man.

Table 5

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|--|---|----------------|
| Mary | Purple shirt with pants and flats Hair is in a curly almost shoulder length style Changes to a black dress and shawl with jewelry and makeup. (00:05:03) Changes to a blue ankle length dress and black heels. (00:09:33) | Close up (00:03:11) Head and shoulders shot (00:05:31) Close Up (00:06:13) Zoom in (00:09:54 - 00:09:59) Two Shot with Sandra (00:12:38) | "Because you lied and that's your punishment" (00:07:02) "You know that note has been out there all day. Why hasn't he called?" (00:11:05) "Oh it wasn't a dream. You're really there" (00:12:11) | Mammy |
| Sandra | Form fitted knee length purple dress with oversized jewelry and heels Hair is in a updo style Changes to vibrant floral button up shirt and pants. | Medium shot (00:01:07) Close up (00:01:13) Close up (00:12:05) Two Shot with Mary (00:12:38) | "You know how many Germans it takes to put in a tail light?" (00:02:40) "Why should he? Yours is already there" (00:12:38) "Cross my heart" (00:18: 49) | Jezebel |

Show 5: *The Cosby Show* Season 1, Ep. 1: "Pilot"

The Huxtable family made TV history because this family became one of TV's firsts to have two successful parents in one household. Claire Huxtable is a mother of four while also pursuing a career as a lawyer. In the first episode, Claire is only shown as being the mother of her kids and the disciplinarian. Her job is not exposed in this first episode while her husband's job as a doctor is made more prominent. In her brief scenes in this episode, Claire is framed using head and shoulder shots and medium shots to pull attention to her stern looks at her children. Claire would be classified as a mammy due to the fact she is the matriarchal figure in her family and is displayed as being the person who keeps the household together rather than a successful woman and mother. The difference between Claire and other mammies is that she does not stay in this role the whole season, she eventually branches out to become something more.

Table 6

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|-----------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Claire Huxtable | Apron over a mid calf length dress with curly almost shoulder length hair | Medium Shot (00:01:14) Head and shoulders shot (00:02:22) Head and shoulders shot (00:05:59) Close up (00:08:12) | "Okay you want to keep dancing around spilling food like a bunch of fools, that's fine with me" (00:01:23) "You are in enough trouble as is young man. Bringing in that report card of yours" (00:05:56) "Cliff why do we have four children?" (00:07:20) "Do you want me to come up there!?" (00:14:36) | Mammy |

Show 6: *Living Single* Season 1, Ep. 1: "Judging by the Cover"

Living Single is a gem of its time and I say that with as little bias as possible. This show was one of the firsts to have a group of black women on prime time television while being created by a black woman. Four women and their two male friends struggle with life in New York city. They go through ups and downs both professionally and personally but they handle it all with jokes and a lot of love for one another. Synclair James is the first of the four women that we meet in this first episode. She is the mammy or the homemaker and her job is to keep the ladies together. However, Synclair is not the stereotypical mammy. Maxine is the sapphire out of the group. She is strong and fierce woman who has a strong presence inside and outside of the courtroom. She is similar to the angry black woman due to the fact that her fierceness and unwillingness to be vulnerable in front of others makes her come off as angry. Maxine Shaw represents the black woman in the workplace, the black woman who is seen as a threat and too confident therefore she is seen as angry. Regine is the jezebel of the group. She searches for love in the wrong places and feels that love comes from a man with money. She represents the black woman who refuses to settle for anything less than what she feels like she deserves. However, her sexuality and her countless of dates makes her the jezebel in the group. Khadeijah can not be labeled, she is a balanced blend of mammy, angry black woman, and sapphire. Khadeijah is stubborn yet motivated, she is a black woman who is comfortable in her own skin and is not afraid to be herself. She is the glue that holds it all together and is the one that everyone seems to turn to when things go wrong. Khadeijah also doesn't fit the standard body type nor style. She is confident whether she is wearing a dress and heels or a basketball jersey and sneakers. All four of these women represent different aspects of a black woman: Max represents strength, Synclair is the goofy yet

homemaker, Regine represents the black woman looking for love and her sexuality, and Khadeijah represents the black woman who sticks to being herself no matter what.

Table 7

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Khadeijah | Cream suit jacket, fitted slacks and a vest. Hair is straightened and is ear length | Head and shoulders shot (00:01:08) Medium Shot (00:07:12) | "Well good it will go with your stretch marks" (00:01:38) "Now if I want this done right, I will have to do this myself" (00:04:30) | N/A |
| Maxine | Purple blazer and matching skirt with heels Hair is in a braided bob | Head and shoulders shot (00:07:52) Head and shoulders shot (00:11:38) | "Today my look and my law were fierce" (00:07:52) "You'd think after God created dog, she'd know creating men were redundant" (00:11:25) | Angry Black Woman/ Sapphire |
| Regine | Fitted white shirt and short skirt with a scarf wrapped around short black hair | Pan (00:01:13-00:01:15) Head and shoulders shot (00:01:22) | "I got good news and I couldn't wait til you got home to rub your noses in it" (00:01:15) "He ate caviar from my cleavage and we drank champagne from my shoe" (00:02:24) | Jezebel |
| Synclair | Black dress with oversized black hat Long curly hair | Medium Shot (00:03:31) Head and shoulders shot (00:10:58) | "I'm making them think we're international" (00:01:00) "Oh how do you do" (00:09:34) | Mammy |

Show 7: *Scandal* Season 1, Ep. 1 "Sweet Baby"

Olivia Pope is a fixer. She fixes things. Things are fixed. Her life is consumed with this job. Everything she do is about the job and is related to her job. Her relationships become about her job, they are the job. Her thoughts are always about the job, they are the job. But what Olivia

does not have fixed, is her personal life, particularly her love life. In the first episode, you are immediately told that Olivia does not play around by the way she is dressed. Her first outfit is a white peacoat perfectly tied, with slacks and heels. Her hair is straight with curly ends and her face carries a stern look. The camera follows Olivia and pans with her strong and powerful walk. The camera looks up to Olivia using low angle shots which emulates more of her power. Olivia can be classified as an angry black woman. Why? Because she lacks vulnerability and her character's strength can be interpreted as anger.

Table 8

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|---|--|-------------------|
| Olivia Pope | <p>White peacoat with a button up shirt and slacks.</p> <p>Hair is straightened with a slight curls at the ends</p> <p>Changes to a Gray blazer, pink top and pants (00:16:30)</p> | <p>Close up (00:02:33)</p> <p>Low angle shot (00:02:55)</p> <p>Head and shoulders shot (00:05:10)</p> <p>Pan and close up (00:10:08-00:10:15)</p> | <p>"What's going to happen is that you and Vlad are gonna take the \$3 million and leave right now for Dulles to make your flight to the motherland" (00:03:33)</p> <p>"Too much cleavage" (00:05:10)</p> <p>"He wants my favor. He wants my services." (00:15:56)</p> <p>"Pick a ring. Marry the Girl. Be normal." (00:27:03)</p> | Angry Black Woman |

Show 8: *Being Mary Jane* Season 1, Ep. 1 "Pilot"

Mary Jane Paul is a successful journalist and represents the few black women that are on prime time talk shows and news shows. Mary Jane seems to have it all together but we quickly find out that it isn't all that it seems to be. The first scene is of Mary Jane, at home wearing a t-

shirt, pants, and hair wrapped up in a bandana. She gets a unexpected visitor and quickly changes after realizing she is going to invite her in. Then the inevitable happens and after a line strikes the audience, “Please God if he’s mine, just give me a sign”. Well later we find out that this is not true and Mary Jane learns the truth about her lover. In the next scenes, Mary Jane’s strength comes out through her fitted dress, perfectly in place hair, and brightly colored blazer. She walks into her job even though she is late, as if nothing has ever happened in the early morning. She puts on a face as many call it, shaking off her vulnerability and putting on her layer of protection. The camera in this first few minutes of this hour and a half pilot, is fluid and frames Mary Jane in ways that gives her power but also diminishes her guard giving her vulnerability. Mary Jane would be classified as the angry black woman only because she fits the definition of being hardened by life and her strength comes off as anger.

Table 9

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|---|---|--|-------------------|
| Mary Jane | T-shirt, shorts, and hair is wrapped up in a bandanna Changes to form fitted black dress with yellow blazer and heels. Hair is long and wavy. (00:07:29) | Over the shoulder shot (00:02:06) Close up (00:05:03) Pan (00:07:36-00:07:39) Head and shoulders shot (00:09:31) | “Please God if he’s mine, just give me a sign” (00:03:21) “Black women aren’t ugly, we are invisible” (00:11:19) “Seriously who’s got a job in this room?” (00:23:55) “No, and don’t ask me again. This is my damn job!” (00:33:38) | Angry Black Woman |

Show 9: *How To Get Away With Murder* Season 1 Ep. 1 “Pilot”

Annalise Keating is the type of professor that you fear to have. She illuminates strength and a no nonsense attitude. She is closed off and especially in this first episode she demands her

attention and her standards to be met. In this first episode, Ms. Keating is first dressed in a fitted leather burgundy top, skirt, and heels with a short haircut that is edgy and fierce to match her strong attitude. The camera uses a lot of moving shots and quick cuts to add to Annalise's already intense personality. The interesting fact about this first episode is that it works off two periods of time, the past and the present. The present continues to go forward while the past is revealed in reverse. This first episode leaves Annalise like the rest of plot a mystery but what is known is that Annalise can be classified as a angry black woman. Her strength and lack of emotion can be interpreted as anger and throughout this first episode we get tiny glimpses of her rage as her standards are not met.

Table 10

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|---|--|-------------------|
| Annalise | <p>Burgundy peplum top and skirt.</p> <p>Hair is straight and cut short</p> <p>Changes to white top and black skirt (00:13:16)</p> <p>Changes to black dress with a little bit of cleavage out (00:16:20)</p> <p>Changes to black fitted dress (29:52)</p> | <p>Dolley or Moving shot (00:03:37)</p> <p>Head and shoulders shot (00:04:02)</p> <p>Close up (00:06:03)</p> <p>Close Up (00:15:30)</p> | <p>"Good morning. I don't know what terrible things you've done in your life up to this point but clearly your karma's out of balance to get assigned to this class" (00:03:37)</p> <p>"Mr. Gibbons, as a defense attorney, I spend most of my time around professional liars, so you have to work really hard to fool me" (00:06:03)</p> <p>"Not until I see how the rest of you step up your game" (00:18:30)</p> <p>"Guess what! You go to jail and I am the shoddy lawyer that put you there" (00:33:57)</p> | Angry Black Woman |

Issa is nothing like the average black woman on television. She works at a non-profit known as “We Got Y’all” and in the first episode, Issa is picked on by the kids she is trying to help by not fitting in what they view as being “normal”. Issa is first dressed in high waisted jeans, a “We Got Y’all” t-shirt, and a African printed over shirt. Her hair is in a short natural style and colored a orangey-brown. She does not talk with a stern inflection in her voice which alludes her from coming off as a angry black woman. Issa is insecure and it is shown especially as she is shown rapping in her mirror. Her life isn’t where she wants it to be and she is very insecure about where she is now and what is to come. The camera in this episode uses a lot of head and shoulder shots and in many of these shots Issa is talking directly into the camera. On the other hand, Molly, Issa’s best friend seems to have life all figured out except for having a man. She fits into the jezebel classification because her sexuality and promiscuity becomes a main component in her characterization. When Molly is first introduced she is wearing a button up white blouse and heels. Her hair is long and straight and she is framed throughout the episode through close ups and medium shots to show off the length and assets of her body.

Table 12

| Character name | Clothing/costumes | Camera angles | Script | Classification |
|----------------|--|---|--|----------------|
| Issa | High waisted jeans, “We Got Y’all T-Shirt”, colorful printed cardigan, converse Hair is a short colored cut Changes to T-Shirt and Shorts (00:04:21) Changes to mustard colored blazer and denim top (00:07:36) | Medium shot (00:01:52) Head and shoulders shot (00:02:42) Head and shoulder shot (almost a close up) (00:04:21) | “And tell your dad that black women aren’t bitter. They are just tired of being expected to settle for less” (00:03:21) “Go shawty, it’s my birthday. But no one cares because I’m not having a party. ‘Cause I’m feeling sorry for my self” (00:04:26) “Bish... whaaaatt?” (00:07:39) | N/A |

| | | | | |
|-------|---|---|--|---------|
| Molly | White button up top with black skirt and long straight black hair | Head and shoulders shot (00:05:16) Close up (00:06:47) | "Yes. He says, 'Hey'" (00:05:54) "I'd never thought I'd end up with someone who wasn't black. You know?" (00:06:24) | Jezebel |
|-------|---|---|--|---------|

Conclusion

The 10 television shows discussed in this study have shown that progressively over time the stereotypes have turned from simply being a mammy to being more of an angry black woman. In the *Beulah Show* and *Good Times*, both Florida and Beulah are portrayed in similar ways. Both characters are framed using close ups to show off their stern faces and over exaggerated reactions to things being said. Both shows end similarly with a close up of the women smiling bright at the camera, with their eyes wide. This look is similar to how black women are portrayed in black face, big smiles and giant wide eyes. Nell from "*Gimme A Break!*" also fits in this mammy category because of the fact she is another big, bold, black woman working to save the day in a white household. Both Nell and Florida are matriarchs in these families and perpetuate the idea that black women are expected to be the anchor and strength of the family.

This idea of strength and holding together a household is also shown with Claire Huxtable from *the Cosby Show* and Mary from *the 227*. All of these women are the disciplinarians in their households and are the matriarchal figures. They all wear a apron or some sort in the first episode symbolizing their fit into the idea that the mammy is the caretaker of the household. They all are framed using close ups and head and shoulder shots to capture their sassy and witty remarks. The mammy stereotype in these early shows, symbolize how the men who created and write these shows feel about women. The mammy represents the black woman in her place and is the black woman that is freed of her slave chains but not free enough to be too much of a threat.

But keeping a black woman in a mammy role only can last for so long. In the more recent shows, black women are written as being very strong and powerful women. Olivia Pope, Analise Keating, Maxine Shaw, and Mary Jane Paul are pioneers for black woman because it is

very rare for black women characters to be written by a black woman. These women represent strength, resilience, success, and most of all they are great at what they do. They are the definition of black girl magic. However, they are angry black women. Their anger is not necessarily anger but more of a interpretation of strength and a lack of vulnerability. Throughout the first season of each of these shows, each of these women cope with their emotions in almost unhealthy ways: Olivia downs her emotions through dinners of popcorn and wine, Annalise drinks away her sorrows, Maxine covers her emotions with jokes, and Mary Jane copes with her emotions through meaningless sexual encounters and drinking. These coping mechanisms allow these women to be human and in fact gives their characters some sort of kryptonite against their hardened shields. However, these strong black women characters continue the neverending cycle that black women have to be seen as strong at all times. All four of these women never allow their weaknesses or emotions to come with them in their work spaces. But behind closed doors and blocked out windows, their emotions still survive. This poses the question of whether a black woman's vulnerability is expected to be hidden behind closed doors? Do we as black women feel that we can not show weakness therefore that is why we void the characters in prime time television shows this same pardon?

Nevertheless, the power of these women is shown in their looks and how they are framed. They are all put together with fitted outfits, heels, and hair styles that have no hair untouched. Their beauty is undeniable and even more then that they represent the working class of black women. The black women who have found themselves but have yet to fill all the holes in their identity. On the other hand, what these characters lack is that individualized personality and even more then that they hide their vulnerability. All of these women are successful black women who

are reaching the heights of their careers. But they all seem to lack one thing: a stable relationship. In *Being Mary Jane*, she struggles with balancing success and a love life and even more than that the ability to get pregnant. Mary Jane represents the current state of successful black women who struggle with these same issues. But it is interesting to note, the only time we see any vulnerability from this group of women is when it comes to issues with love and relationships. It almost portrays the idea that love is the only weakness of a black woman.

On the other hand, Issa and Khadeejah are themselves from the first time they are introduced. Khadeejah is a larger woman but does not reside in the stereotypical mammy role. Khadeejah is versatile and can be seen wearing anything from a basketball jersey and jeans to a fitted dress or professional suit. She is ambitious and stubborn but is never indifferent of her personality. This is the same with Issa despite the fact that she is insecure in her life, Issa stays true to herself or the parts of herself that she is secure about.

Insecure allows black women to be themselves in the sense that it is a rare time that a black woman rids herself of all stereotypes and is simply herself. Issa and Khadeejah do not fit in any of the stereotypes because they do not wear these stereotypes on their chest like t-shirts. Issa allows the audience to see a different side of a black woman. She is vulnerable and is seen as a human. This is even more expressed through the relaxed clothes that she wears and through the fluidity of the camera. The camera moves around Issa and shows her in different angles instead of simply putting a tight framed close up around her. The use of the camera in this way allows Issa to be seen in different angles and it adds on to the complexity of her character. Issa unlike other black women on television is allowed to feel and is allowed to live a life not defined by being too strong and shows emotion. Like the ABWs, Khadeejah and Issa also find themselves

trying to balance their career and their love life. However their slew of relationships is not the only reason we see a sense of vulnerability from them. Throughout the show, Khadeejah shows her emotions in particular to the success of her magazine while Issa shows her through her quest to figure everything out and be more comfortable with herself.

The results of this study show that the stereotypes of black women are still very prevalent in television shows. In the earlier shows, black women were portrayed as mammies or women who were in charge of continuing the idea that a black woman's job is to hold down her household. In the most recent shows, black women are portrayed as angry and are consistently shown as mouthy, sassy, and withdrawn from showing any weakness or emotions. According to Kimberly Springer, "The image of the angry black woman has always been present on television, particularly in the form of a mouthy harpy. Media critics and African-American historians duly note the image of the nurturing mammy, the loud mouthed Sapphire, and the oversexed Jezebel as staples in television genres from situation comedies to family dramas to comedy sketch programs". These stereotypes of black women are used as a source of entertainment but the question still remains as to why do black women allow these stereotypes to remain?

As stated earlier in this study, there are only a small amount of women who are writers or directors or even executive producers. Through the data of this study, it was found to be true through the small number of black women who were a part of the production of the shows studied. Today it seems that black men have taken over the burden of writing and creating characters to tell the stories of black women rather than black women telling their own stories. Tyler Perry has created an empire portraying a unconventional black woman who is the glue that holds her family and friends together. Madea has become everyone's backbone and in fact has been princi-

ple in teaching me some of my most valuable lessons through her words in Tyler Perry's plays and films. However, what if Madea wasn't portrayed by a man? Would black women still accept her in the same light?

This study asks the questions of: How has slavery impacted stereotypes?; How are black women portrayed in our media in regards to stereotypes?; and what can be done to change this image? Slavery has created the perceptions of black women that plague our media and popular culture mindset. White men view black women as being too much or too loud while black men believe that black women are bitter and should stop complaining. Black women believe that black women should just remain strong and never show weakness. These statements are proven by how black female characters throughout television history have been written. They all follow the same themes and whether that is being a subservient mammy (Florida, Claire, Beulah, and Nell) or an angry black woman (Olivia, Mary Jane, Maxine, and Annalise), the stereotypes remain. The three main stereotypes in television have only progressed as reality tv grows its fame and is allowing black women to be portrayed even more as jezebels and angry black women than ever before.

According to Springer, "to bring current Audre Lorde's metaphor, the master's house has not, in fact been dismantled, but instead has added additional rooms and annexes in which to harbor oppressive variations of racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist themes". In other words, Lorde is saying that slavery may have ended legally but black women are still enslaved by these stereotypes. The mammy stereotype chains black women to being the matriarchal figure and remain subservient to not only just white people but black men as well. The mammy is the woman who understands her place as being the spine of a black man and uplifting the household while

continuously remaining in her “rightful place”. The jezebel stereotype chains black women to the idea that black women’s bodies are sexual playgrounds for pleasure and that black women are sexual deviants who crave nothing more than to ruin a man with her sexual wonders. The angry black woman or Sapphire chains black women to always having to be strong or sassy or loud at all times. Black men chain black women to be mammies. White men chain black women to be jezebels. Black woman chain black women to be angry.

The last question that this study asks is what can be done to change this image? 2018 is the year of Wakanda and it is a year for black people specifically black women to take control over our media and our image. The first step to fix the black woman’s image is to first change how we view ourselves. The next step would be to increase the amount of black women behind the camera in the production field. There needs to be more Ava DuVernays, Oprah Winfreys, Debbie Allens, and Shonda Rhimeses. More black women need to write, produce, and direct television shows in order to finally have black women writing for ourselves. But in order for these shows to become the next *Living Single* or *Insecure*, black women have to allow ourselves some sort of weakness and allow our characters to be vulnerable.

The dialogue in each of these shows are truly what shows the stereotypes against them. The script is simple but yet each character has a sort of sass when they speak in order to heighten the stereotypes of the show. The mammies are witty and they talk in a stern tone especially when they have to discipline a child. An example of this is when Claire Huxtable says, “You are in enough trouble as is young man. Bringing in that report card of yours”. The jezabels seem to have a overdramatic or seductive voice to them and their dialogue is usually over the top and always has something to do with a man. An example of this is when Regine states, “He ate

caviar from my cleavage and we drank champagne from my shoe”. The angry black woman’s dialogue comes off as angry and is spoken in short bursts. Olivia Pope talks in a stern tone and even sometimes her volume get loud which only insinuates the stereotype more. An example of this is when Olivia states, “What’s going to happen is that you and Vlad are gonna take the \$3 million and leave right now for Dulles to make your flight to the motherland”. The ABW always speaks confidently and her power is shown in her dialogue. It doesn’t take much for this stereotype to come through because a simple change in volume or pacing brings it to light.

One thing I have noticed throughout this study is that many of the shows produced leave a gap in time that should be discussed. The period between college and adult life is pivotal for many because it is the period in which finding yourself is the most important. As a woman embarking on such journey, it is unsettling to not see the media only discuss where I have been and where I may go but never the journey in between. The show a *Different World* is one of the only black television shows that display life at a historically black institution. The show not only shows college life but it gives insight on life after college and the struggles of finding a job or a next step. Currently, prime time television has *Grown-ish* which focuses on a black girl navigating through college. But what we still lack presently is a show that shows a black girl leaving college and entering the life of possibilities.

It is because of this gap, I have created my own potential television show. *Black Girl: Unknown* is a show that is my truth. I have created a show I feel that will connect to women who are my age and women who are older than me. It is a show that focuses on two characters who are leaving the bubble of college and entering the world where the stereotypes against black woman reign supreme. I wrote two scripts for this first episode in which I called, “The Confes-

sion Tapes". What my shows do that the shows I analyze do not accomplish is that this show shows the vulnerability of these two black women. They have attitude and sass to them but it is shown in a way that it does not supercede their emotion and vulnerability. They have personality and they have a sense that they do not have all the answers and it is okay. *Black Girl: Unknown* adds a voice to black media that is lacking and that voice is a one of uncertainty.

Script 1: "Black Nectar"

(Speak kind of fast, with a new york accent)

Hey my name is Shantel... I'm 21 and I will be graduating from Auburn University in May 2018.

When I think of college, there is this one story that comes to mind. One time I got matched with this white guy named Dave and he was cute. I mean I don't usually do the whole interracial love connection thing but you know, it's college so why not? So Dave matches me or whatever and then he messages me. So you know your girl was lit right? This could possibly be Mr. Right Now. I open up the message all giddy and shit right... and the message read, "Hey how are you beautiful?"

Bitch I about lost it. Im laughing and smiling in the middle of my boring ass history class where I am the token black slave for every conversation about black history. So I take my time messaging him back, I don't want to seem too desperate. All cool and calm and collected and shit. I reply back cooly, "Hey love, I'm good. What about you?"

See he ain't like niggas where you can't say cute shit. Niggas see love or boo and immediately think they about to get some ass. So since this a white guy, I hit him with the "love" so he thinks I'm flirting right.. And so he replies "I have never fucked a black girl before. Do you think you can help me out with that? I mean I would love to drink from your chocolate nectar"

Wow. Just when I thought, hey maybe I will try something new. I was disappointed once again. I didn't even respond after that because Dave had me fucked up. So because I am black, it makes me some illicit dream? Oh I am just a exotic candy that mother fuckers try every now and then?

This shit baffles me but it doesn't surprise me. You know niggas dont like black women either. Nah, if you ain't light skin with a big ass and big tit-ties they don't want you.

Script 2: "Oh so you think you're better than me?"

My name is Jasmine. I am 20 and I will be graduating from the University of South Carolina in 2018.

I decided to do this show because, I want to tell my story. And my story has been (pause) that because I am light skin (pauses again and takes a breath) I must think I am better than everyone else. See, They say that when you are light skinned you automatically think you are better than everyone else.

Light skinned and smarter and better. This is all MY people have ever seemed to see when I come in the room. Black guys look at me and they only want me because I am light skin. I was once told, "Damn you just my type. Light skinned and long-hair". This is all they think I have to offer to them. And it doesn't stop there, even black girls will sometimes look at me and go: "Oh you light skinned and smart? Bitch you got it made huh?"

Adding to this is the more than occasional claim that I am not "black enough". I go to school, made sure that I'll graduate with ALL honors, work two jobs, and have no choice but to work hard in everything I do just because people want to see me fail or think I'm not capable. And yet... the only people who seem to semi-accept me is the white people who think I am funny or "interesting", whatever that means. I just wish my acceptance was based on more than the color of my skin.

I wish that I could just be Jasmine. Here I am, nothing else attached. But instead I am either Jasmine, the token black girl in a group of white people, Jasmine the pretty light skin, or Jasmine the one who think she is better than everyone else.

And now.. Now with graduation looming around the corner.. I wonder what Jasmine will matter the most.

Future Directions and Limitations

This study is only a tiny part of the whole universe of television shows that were made and I am only limited in the drawing of my conclusions by the samples I have chosen. Because of such limitations, I can not make sweeping, overly broad generalizations about trends in television. It is important to note that some of the issues discussed in this study are not shown in current television shows such as *Grown-ish* and *Insecure*. The main characters of both of these shows do not fit in the stereotypes discussed in this research. These shows are innovative in that they present positive images of black women in the present day. *Grown-ish* depicts a black girl

being the central figure amongst a diverse group of friends. Insecure as discussed earlier in this study, has a black woman who fits none of the stereotypes try to figure out the things in her life that make her happy.

This study is also limited in that it does not discuss other issues affecting black women in the media such as colorism. In the future, I hope to further my research through discussing colorism in television shows and how this issue affects the portrayals of black women. It is one step to look at the stereotypes of black women, but the next step would be to look at how these stereotypes and colorism are linked together. I would be interested in the future in taking a look at how colorism plays a role in the shows *Grown-ish* and a *Different World*. My goal for my future research is to continue the conversations started on this issue and to ultimately provide insight to these issues from the perspective a young black woman entering the adult world.

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